

W-14-65  
2000/22-22-63

Master II

McNamara Economic Club Speech  
18 November 1968

Before long this Administration will be presenting, once again, the details of a proposed national defense budget for the consideration of the Congress and the public. Given the importance of these matters, their complexities and uncertainties and the existence of real differences of opinion, a degree of controversy is inevitable, and even desirable.

Some controversies, however, reveal underlying differences in

perspective that scarcely suggest the participants are living in the  
life, in which some critics suggest that we have literally hundreds of  
times more strength than we need; others accuse us of risking the whole  
future of the nation when on the basis of careful analysis we choose to add one  
system of weapons over another, by engaging in unilateral disarmament and  
in unilateral disarmament. I would like to believe that sufficient

bracketing our policy in that fashion prove it to be rational and sound.

But a discrepancy of that order cannot be reassuring. Rather, it  
6  
indicates that we have failed to convey to some part of our audience  
even the broadest outlines, as we see them, of the problems that our  
military strategy and force structure are meant to address. I believe  
we should be able to move from controversy on that subject toward  
consensus in military affairs, not always on details or components of  
our policies, but at least on an appreciation of the major elements

2

security problems confronting us, on the broad alternatives open to their solution and on the command goals, objectives, costs and risks affecting choice. My purpose in speaking to you this evening is to help move in this direction.

As a prelude, then, to the coming season of debate, I should like to identify and discuss some basic matters on which a considerable possible degree of consensus seems to me both conceivable and desirable, although by no means assured.

These include those over-all comparative strengths and weaknesses of the opposing military alliances that form the bold relief in the strategic environment. In short, they are the considerations that seem to have relatively long-term significance compared to the annual budget cycle.

Matters of that degree of permanence tend to be stamped on our minds as being unchanging and unchangeable, the unquestioned framework of daily and yearly policy-making. Yet those factors of which I shall speak do change: more swiftly and more profoundly than our picture of them tends to change. Indeed, I believe it is just the fact that over the last decade this topography has changed -- but many maps have not -- that accounts for some apparently irreconcilable controversies.

Let me recall the earlier period briefly, for comparison. The strategic landscape at the outset of the 'Fifties was dominated by two

outstanding features. One was the presumed U.S. monopoly of deliverable, strategic nuclear weapons. The other was the Soviet Union and Communist China's virtual monopoly of ground forces on the continents of Europe and Asia.

Both of these foundations of Western military policy had been considerably undermined by the end of the Korean War. The Soviets had developed atomic weapons and had created a sizable missile delivery capability against Europe, while NATO ground forces had expanded rapidly, and military operations in Korea had greatly tarnished the significance of Chinese Communist superiority in numbers. But the old notions of monopoly persisted as short-cut aids to thinking on policy matters. And they were not so misleading as they came later to be. Soviet armed forces approaching five million men still heavily outweighed the NATO forces in Europe; and Soviet delivery capability against the U.S. was dwarfed by that of SAC. Moreover, tactical nuclear weapons were being heralded as a new nuclear monopoly for the West.

Even as these earlier notions of monopolies grew obsolete, ideas about the feasibility of alternative policies continued to reflect them. So did ideas about how wars might be fought. Nuclear operations, both strategic and tactical, by the U.S. in response to Soviet aggression against our allies, would be virtually unilateral. Hence it was at the top the problem of credibility of the U.S. intelligence would directly affect

6

even in the case of relatively limited Soviet aggressions. Western reliance upon nuclear weapons, in particular strategic systems, both to deter and to oppose non-nuclear attack of any size seemed not only adequate but also unique in its adequacy.

That sort of situation is convenient for policy-makers. It makes policy easy to choose and easy to explain. Perhaps due to the overwhelming effect of the "Treaties," while the Soviets under various pretexts decreased their ground forces and the NATO allies built theirs up, and while the Soviets acquired a massive nuclear threat against Europe and laid the groundwork for a sizable threat against the U.S., the picture underlying <sup>very close to</sup> ~~almost naked~~ <sup>a</sup> ~~but almost~~ policy debate remained <sup>but</sup> appropriate to 1949. It was the picture of a Communist Goliath in conventional strength facing a Western David, <sup>overwhelmingly</sup> ~~but~~ <sup>superior-</sup> almost naked of conventional arms but possessed of a nuclear sling.

Toward the end of that decade, the prospect that the Soviets <sup>when they had broken a nuclear</sup> would acquire ICBMs at a time when our strategic forces consisted almost entirely of bombers focused our attention and our budget even more sharply than before upon our strategic forces. The urgency of the problem of deterring the most massive of attacks was a new reason for thinking that the West could spare neither resources nor thought to deal more specifically with lesser threats. The most urgent task was to provide for deterrence of massive aggression by assuring that we could, under any assault of forces as vast as adequate, in the calculations of a

potential attacker, to destroy his society in retaliation. It is to maintain the assurance of continued nuclear superiority that procreates the attention of policy-makers but, on the contrary, the struggle to maintain it. It postponed the process of determining the right balance between living-army-politics-base-dealing with the now dominant situation. It is still doing it now.

But it is time at last for the maps to change by which policy is charted and justified. The old ones, which assumed a U.S. nuclear monopoly, both strategic and tactical, and a Communist monopoly of ground combat strength, are too far removed from reality to serve as even rough guides. Neither we nor our allies can afford the crudities of maps that tell us that old policies are still forced upon us, when a true picture would show important new options of choice, necessity and choice.

What most needs changing is a picture of ourselves and of the Western Alliance as essentially at bay, outnumbered and outgunned except for nuclear arms no longer exclusively ours. We should not think of ourselves as forced by limitations of resources to rely upon strategies of desperation and threats of vast mutual destruction, compelled to deal only with the most massive and immediate challenges, letting lesser ones go by default. It would be a striking historical phenomenon if that self-image should be justified. We are the largest member of an alliance with a population of almost 450 million people, an aggregate annual product which is fast approaching a trillion dollars, with a modern and diverse technological base without parallel, facing the

Soviet Union and its European satellites with their handicapped and about 200 million fewer people and an aggregate output no more than half that of the West.

And

Let me summarize the current status of the balance of strategic nuclear forces, that part of the military environment that has preoccupied our attention for so long. In strictly relative numerical terms, the situation is the familiar one. The U.S. force now contains more than 500 operational long-range ballistic missiles -- ATLAS, TITAN, MINUTEMAN, POLARIS -- and is planned to increase to over 1700 by 1966. There is no doubt in our minds and none in the minds of the Soviets that these missiles can penetrate to their targets. In addition, the U.S. has SAC bombers on air alert and over 500 SAC bombers on quick reaction ground alert. By comparison, the consensus is that today about the Soviets could place ~~about~~ about half as many bombers over North America on a first strike. The Soviets are estimated to have today only a fraction as many ICBM missiles as we do. Furthermore, their

submarine-launched ballistic missiles are short range, (approximately 1000 miles) and generally are not comparable to our POLARIS force. The

Soviets pose a very large threat against Europe, involving hundreds of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Today, this threat is covered/protected by the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.

b4 b6

superiority of our strategic forces. In fact, by 1964, it is estimated that the U.S. strategic missile force alone will outnumber the total Soviet missile forces threatening Europe and North America.

The most wishful of Soviet planners, under the most favorable of conditions, would have to calculate as a certainty that the most effective surprise attack they could launch would still leave the NATO Alliance with the capability to destroy the attacker's society. What is equally pertinent is that the relative numbers and survivability of U.S. strategic forces would permit us to sever all the urgent Soviet military targets are subject to attack, contributing that can be covered, and thus contribute to the limitation of damage to ourselves and our allies.

Deterrence of deliberate, calculated attack seems as well assured as it can be, and the damage-limiting capability of our numerically superior forces is, I believe, well worth its incremental cost. It is a capability to which the smaller forces of the Soviet Union could not realistically aspire. That is one reason, among others, why I would not trade our strategic posture for that of the Soviets at any point during the coming decade.

including submarine-launched missiles beyond the reach of our aircraft.

But given the kind of force that the Soviets are building, the Soviets could damage to which we can limit the Soviet capability to inflict on us and no matter what we do to limit it, our allies remain extremely high.

That has been true for over a decade now since the mid-1950s and 1960s. Soviet acquisition of a missile delivery capability against the U.S., and more significantly their acquisition of relatively protected forces, submarine-launched or hardened, has been long and often prematurely heralded. Its arrival in fact merely dramatizes the need to recognize that strategic nuclear war would under all foreseeable circumstances be bilateral, and highly destructive to both sides.

Larger budgets for U.S. strategic forces would not change that fact. They could have only a decreasing incremental effect in limiting the damage that the U.S. and its allies could suffer in a general nuclear war. In short, we cannot buy the capability to make a strategic bombing campaign once again a unilateral prospect.

That must, I suggest, be accepted as one of the landmarks affecting policy. Another is that the same situation confronts the Soviet leaders, in a way that is even more intensely confining. In fact, enormous increases in Soviet budgets would be required for them to achieve any significant degree of damage-limiting capability. The present Soviet leaders show no tendency to challenge the logic of the U.S. strategic deterrent posture by such expenditures.

In the last two years alone, we have increased the total nuclear warheads in the strategic alert forces by 100%. During that period we have more than doubled the megatonnage of the strategic alert forces. The fact that further increases in strategic forces size will at last encounter rapidly diminishing returns -- which is largely an effect of the very large investments the U.S. has made in this area -- should be reflected in future budgets. The funding for the initial introduction of missiles into our forces is two day compilation. We can anticipate that the annual expenditure on strategic forces will drop substantially and level off well below the present rate of spending. This is not to rule out the possibility that research now in progress on possible new technological developments, including the possibility of useful ballistic missile defences, will require major new expenditures. In any event, those will be recurring costs of modernization.

In the field of tactical nuclear weapons, the picture is in important respects similar. The U.S. at present has in stockpile or planned for stockpile tens of thousands of nuclear explosives for tactical use on the battlefield, in anti-submarine warfare and against aircraft. They include warheads for artillery, battlefield missiles, demolition munitions, bombs, depth charges, air-to-air missiles and surface-to-air missiles. The consensus is that the U.S. is presently substantially superior in design, diversity and numbers in this class of weapons. In the past

(250, 19)

This is an indispensable superiority, as we can readily understand if we consider how our problems of strategic choice would be altered if the tables were reversed and it were the Soviet Union which held a commanding lead in this field. Nevertheless, what we have is superiority, not monopoly, and even if it can be limited, below some ill-defined threshold of strategic exchange, the key fact is that if the West initiates such actions in the future, tactical-nuclear warfare must be expected to be bilateral, in any theater which engaged the Soviet Union. Again, we cannot buy back a monopoly, or the assurance of unilateral use.

Finally, there is the area of what we call the general purpose forces. Within the last two years, we have increased the number of our combat-ready Army divisions by about 45%, from 11 to 16. There has been a 30% increase in the number of tactical air squadrons; a 75% increase in lift capabilities; and a 100% increase in ship construction and conversion to modernize the fleet.

But it is not only force size that matters. The key to the effective utilization of these forces is combat readiness and mobility.

The most recent demonstration of our ability to reinforce our troops presently stationed in Europe occurred last month in Exercise BIG EASY, the first of a series of planned large-scale exercises covering the Middle East and the Far East as well. For the first time in military history, an entire division was airlifted through the Mediterranean. That movement could never have been accomplished without a successful

increase in our airlift capability, which is still being expanded. (It will have risen 400% between 1961 and 1967.) It required the development of new techniques to preposition combat equipment, of which we have two and three-shiploads in forward floating depots in Subic Bay. Extra division sets now in Europe. It called for new techniques in military training and administration to make sure that units are really ready to move out on a moment's notice. This exercise, in which some

16,000 airmen and soldiers and more than 350 planes took part, is directly relevant to the needs of Europe, where it brought a seventh division to join the six that are to remain in place. It is also relevant to the ability of the U.S. to fulfill its policy commitments worldwide, swiftly and in effective strength.

But, it might be asked, what is the relevance of all this to the realistic security problems of the United States and its allies? To what contingencies are these forces expected to contribute, and how effective might they be, measured against the strength of opposing forces? How meaningful is it to talk of 16 or 20 or 30 divisions in opposing the ground armies of the Soviet Union and Communist China?

Such questions are often meant to be merely rhetorical, in view of the supposed masses of Communist troops. The fact is that they are serious, difficult questions, to which I shall suggest some tentative answers. But it is difficult to encourage realistic discussions of specific contingencies so long as the shadow of the Communist Menace

large unchallenged over the debate. The actual contingencies that seem

to be to me most likely and most significant are not those which would (48)  
or Chinese Communist involve all, or even a major part, of the Soviet bloc/armed forces, - nor do they all involve Europe.

Hence, aggregate figures of armed strength are not immediately relevant to (49)  
of NATO and the Warsaw Pact nations to them. But it is useful to make these overall comparisons, for (50)  
they are frequently alluded, precisely because misleading or obsolete notions

of these very aggregates often produce an attitude of hopelessness (51)  
anywhere toward any attempt to prepare to meet Communist forces/in ground  
combat, however limited in scope. (52)

The announced total of Soviet armed forces for 1953 was indeed a formidable 5.75 million men. Today that figure has been cut to about 3.3 million; the Warsaw Pact total including the Soviets is only about 4.5 million. Against that, it is today the members of NATO whose active armed forces number 5.2 million men. The ground forces of NATO nations total 3.2 million, of which 2.2 million men are in Europe, as against ground combat forces

(DIA) the Soviet Army's-active-unit total of about 2 million men, and a Warsaw (53) Pact total of about 3 million. In Central Europe, NATO has more men, (MEDEVAC) and more combat troops, on the ground than does the Bloc. It has more men on the ground in West Germany than the Bloc does in East Germany.

Moreover, many of the satellite units are of doubtful ability and reliability. In the specific field of tactical aircraft, NATO has more and better tactical aircraft. These planes on the average can carry twice the payload twice as far as the Soviet counterparts.

These facts are hard to reconcile with the familiar picture of the Russian Army as incomparably massive. The usual index often used to support that picture is numbers of total active divisions, and the official number committed from the past is 175 divisions in the Soviet Army.

This total, if true, would indeed present a paradox. ~~After all, the forces are about equal, but the men are about 20% less.~~ The only other concession of the intelligence community that two million men form a reasonable approximation to the size of the Soviet ground forces, compared to about one million for the U.S. How is it that the Soviets can muster ten times the number of active, combat-ready, fully-manned divisions that the United States has manned, with only twice as many men on active duty? The answer is simply that they do not. Recent intensive investigation has shown that the number of active Soviet divisions that are maintained at manning levels anywhere close to combat readiness is less than half of the 160-175 figure.

What remains is a large number, but even that is misleading. For one thing, U.S. divisions have about twice as many men in the divisional unit and its immediate combat supporting units as comparable Soviet divisions. (A U.S. mechanized division has 33% more personnel in maneuvering units, 300% more in armored cavalry, 26% more engineers, 110% more signals, 55% more armored personnel carriers,

etc. etc.

and 2000% more aircraft available in support than Soviet divisions.<sup>12</sup> In addition to longer staying power, much of the U.S. manpower and equipment margin is excess that would make Macmillan's point. <sup>13</sup> On the other hand, we were to reorganize along Soviet lines, we would display far greater numbers of divisions comparable to those of the Soviets.

The Soviet combat-ready force remains a formidable one. Moreover, the Russians do have a powerful mobilization capability; in particular, they have a large number of lightly manned or cadre divisions to be filled out on mobilization. Still, this reality remains strikingly different from our accustomed maps of it. 

I do not wish to suggest that such aggregate comparisons are by themselves a valid index to military capabilities. But they are enough to suggest the absurdity, as a picture of the prevailing military strengths on which new efforts might build, of David and Goliath notions borrowed from 1949.

None of this is to say that NATO strength on the ground in Europe is adequate to turn back without nuclear weapons an all-out surprise non-nuclear attack. It is not, nor could it be during the next several

that is..

But these are not in any case the contingencies toward which the recent and future improvements in the mobility and combat abilities of U.S. general purpose forces are primarily oriented. Aggression on that scale would mean a war about the future of Europe and, as a consequence, the future of the U.S. and the USSR. In the face of threats of that magnitude, our nuclear superiority becomes highly relevant to deterrence. The Soviets know that even non-nuclear aggression at that high end of the spectrum of conflict so threatens our most vital interests that we and our allies are prepared to make whatever response may be required to defeat it, no matter how terrible the consequences for our own society.

The probability that the Soviet leaders would choose to invoke that exchange seems to me very low indeed. They know well what even the Chinese Communist leaders must soon learn, that a nuclear war would mean destruction of everything they have built up for themselves, since Lenin arrived at the Finland Station, less than 50 years ago.

If we were to consider a spectrum of the possible cases of Communist aggression, then, ranging from harassment, covert aggression and indirect challenge at one end of the scale to the massive invasion of Western Europe or a full scale nuclear strike against the West at the other end, it is clear that our nuclear superiority has been and should

16  
Insert, page 17:

I know of no one strategic rule which can define the ideal balance of readiness for all contingencies everywhere. No commander ever has everything he wants. We and our allies together have hard choices to make, and it is urgent that we should find paths toward closer agreement and more effective common action. I do not wish, today, to prejudge the decisions of NATO, or the response of our allies, or to insist on a single simple rule.

My point is different. It is that at every level of force, the Alliance in general, and the U.S. Armed Forces in particular, have greater and more effective strength than we are in the habit of thinking -- and with reasonable continued effort we can have whatever strength we need. I have spoken already of strategic weapons, where the great superiority of the United States is the superiority also of the Alliance. In tactical weapons a parallel superiority exists -- and while many of our Allies share with us in manning the systems which would use these tactical warheads in the hour of need, it is not unfair to point out that even more than in the strategic field, the tactical nuclear strength of the Alliance is a contribution of the United States. That strength has been increased, on the ground in Europe, by more than 60% in the last two years. Today the thousands of U.S. warheads deployed on the continent for the immediate

defense of Europe have a combined explosive strength more than 15,000 times the force of the nuclear weapons used to end the Second War. Tactical nuclear strength the Alliance has today, and we have provided it.

But neither we nor our Allies can find the detonation of such weapons -- and their inevitable bilateral exchange -- an easy first choice. At the lower end of the spectrum, therefore, we also need strong and ready conventional forces. We have done our part here -- and we continue to believe it just -- and practicable -- for our partners to do theirs.

continue to be an effective deterrent to aggression at the high end of the spectrum. It is equally clear, on the other hand, that at the very low end of the spectrum a nuclear weapons/total war approach is not credible, and that nuclear power alone cannot be an effective deterrent at this level.

(JFK) /In the future any more than it has been in the past.

*initial* The most difficult questions arise over the best means for meeting a variety of dangerous international challenges, those which threaten the possibility of sizable conflict while still not raising the immediate issue of the national survival of ourselves or of any member of our alliances. For example, the past ten years have witnessed the violent Soviet suppression of uprisings in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary, attempts at subversion in Africa, moves against the Outer Hebrides, pressure on Berlin, and a year ago, the most dangerous gamble of the post-war era in Cuba. Evidently, nuclear power did not succeed in deterring those actions or attempts, nor would it have been obviously appropriate in dealing with any resulting conflicts.

(JFK) (note) Similar conflicts might arise out of Soviet subversion and political aggression backed up by military measures in non-NATO areas in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. There is a range of challenges that could arise from Communist China and its satellites in the Far East and in Southeast Asia. Most dangerously, an invading

17

the upper end of the spectrum, there is the possibility of massive Soviet pressures on NATO territory itself, along the vast front running from Norway to Greece and Turkey. Both the tanks and the combat aircraft. And always, potential targets. Above all, of course, there are the contingencies that could arise in relation to Berlin.

It is difficult to say just how probable any of these circumstances might be, although they must be regarded as more likely than still larger aggressions. What one can say is that if any of those more likely contingencies should arise, they would be highly dangerous. Inaction, or weak action, could result in a serious setback, missed opportunity or even disaster. In fact, if either a nuclear exchange or a major Soviet attack should occur, it would most likely arise from a conflict on a lesser scale, which Western capabilities had failed to deter and which an inadequate Western response had failed to curb in time.

(See insert)

Since World War II, the expansionist impulse of the Communist Bloc is clear, but equally clear is its desire to avoid direct confrontation with the military forces of the free world. In Greece, in Berlin, off the coast of China, and in Cuba, Communists have probed for (R) (n) military and political weakness but when they have encountered resistance, they have/retreated. Not only Communist doctrine has counselled this caution, but respect for the danger that any significant overt conflict would lead to nuclear war. It would follow that no

(SFK)

deterrent would be more effective against those lesser and intermediate levels of challenge than the assurance that such moves would certainly meet prompt, effective military response by the West. That response frustration of their purposes could confront the Soviets with ~~local~~ & ~~most~~ ~~an~~ withdrawal. Unless they chose themselves to escalate the conflict to a nuclear exchange, or to levels that made nuclear war highly probable -- a choice they are unlikely to make in the face of our superiority.

The basis for that particular assurance cannot be systems in development, or weapons in storage depots, or reserves that must be mobilized, trained and equipped, or troops without transport. We need the right combination of forward deployment and highly mobile combat-ready ground, sea and air units, capable of prompt and effective commitment to actual combat, including tactical offensive employment. In short, the sort of capability we are increasingly building in our forces.

of us -- as of our Allies --

This capability requires a military establishment that is, in the President's words lean and fit. We must stop and ask ourselves before deciding whether to add a new and complex weapons system to our inventory, whether it is really the most effective way to do the job under the rigorous conditions of combat. We must examine constantly the possibilities for combining functions, particularly in weapons that could be used by two or more Services. Given this tough-minded sense of reality about the requirements of combat readiness, it should be possible, easily to

maintain but to expand this increased strength without overall increase in our defense budget. As our national productivity and our gross national product expand, the defense budget therefore need not keep pace. Indeed, in relative-- and perhaps even absolute -- terms it appears likely that measured/budgeted absolute combat strength, the defense budget will level off and perhaps decline slightly. At the same time, we are continuing the essential effort to reduce the impact of defense spending on our balance of payments. We have already brought this figure down from \$2.7 billion in FY 1961 to \$1.7 billion for FY 1963, and we shall continue to reduce it, without reducing the combat ground forces deployed in Europe, and while strengthening our overall combat effectiveness.

~~(SFR)~~ An essential factor in giving full effect to the combat readiness of our forces is the will to use them. That means to use them, if necessary, in actual combat, and against modern, well-equipped units of comparable size: including, if need be, Soviet troops.

~~(SFR)~~ I do not say this in a spirit of belligerence or with any tendency to deprecate the risks that would attend any such direct engagement, even at the lowest levels. Nor do I believe that the Soviet leaders are more likely in the future than in the past to provide us with a challenge to such conflict. ~~(SFR)~~ and it must be accepted, in my judgment, that if they do, ~~(SFR)~~ I do not regard the present Communist leaders -- even, despite their bluster, the Chinese Communist leaders -- as/recalcuse in action. ~~(SFR)~~ But recent experience, in Cuba and, on a lesser scale, in Berlin, has not persuaded me that I can predict with confidence the sorts of challenges that Communist leaders will come to think prudent and profitable. If

They were again to miscalculate as dangerously as they did a moment ago.

It would be essential to confront them, whatever that might be, with the same pressure that confronted them in order to the contingency of immediate, appropriate, and full effective military action.

All of our strengths, including our strategic and tactical nuclear forces, contributed <sup>last year</sup> to this success, and they would contribute in similar future situations to the effectiveness of our response, by providing a basis for assurance that the Soviets would not dangerously escalate or change the locale of the conflict. But above all, in order to fashion that response, and to promise the Soviets local defeat in case of actual ground conflict, we had to use every element of the improvements in combat readiness and mobility that had been building over the preceding year and a half, including combat divisions, air transport, and tactical air. And the last ingredient was also there: the will to use those forces against Soviet troops and equipment.

Let us not delude ourselves with obsolete images into believing that our nuclear strength, great as it is, solves all of our problems of national security, or that we lack the strengths to meet those problems that it does not solve. In the contingencies that readily threaten -- the <sup>same</sup> and our allies sort that occurred and will occur again -- we need no longer choose to

11

live with the sense of the reality of inferiority to the Soviet Union.  
Let us be fully aware of the wide range of our  
military resources, and the freedom they can give us to pursue the  
peaceful objectives of the free world without fear of military aggression.